

# What I-696 will look like

There's been a lot of talk about Interstate-696, but few specifics about its exact route or appearance.

Last week, Secretary of Transportation Neil Goldschmidt approved the environmental impact statement for the last stretch of the freeway. In doing so, he prescribed a number of features for the freeway. Others major features have been filled in by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

As a result, a clearer picture of the freeway has been drawn.

The recently approved section of I-696 will close the last gap in I-696, the Walter Reuther Freeway, which will extend for 23.5 miles through the northern suburbs of the Detroit metropolitan area, connecting I-94 to I-96.

There will be eight freeway lanes from I-75 to Southfield Road and six lanes from Southfield Road to Northwestern Highway. According to an MDOT report issued late last week, the service roads will be one-way, two or three lanes wide.

The freeway will be below ground level throughout, with service roads above the route parallels 10 and 11 mile roads.

RETAINING WALLS WILL be incorporated along most of the project to minimize the width of the right of way, MDOT officials say. Access ramps are planned at Lahser, Evergreen, Southfield Road, Greenfield, Coolidge, Woodward and near Campbell.

The interchange at Woodward is being redesigned to accommodate the

## I-696 a long battle

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696 is in the final throes.

Despite such optimism, I-696 remained entangled in state and federal agencies which were still arguing about the environmental impact on the zoo and golf course.

AN EDITORIAL in the January 1977 Southfield. Eccentric stated, "Those who have opposed the completion of I-696 have had their reasons, but none of those reasons seem as strong as the argument for human life against the 45 accidents per month that will continue on the mile road intersections until the expressway is completed."

Homeowners in the proposed path of I-696 also had their share of problems over the years. Few new buyers were interested in the sparsely populated subdivisions that lay near the highway's path.

Zoning disputes arose, as investors told city council they would purchase property in fringe areas only if it were rezoned to permit low-rise, multiple-family units.

The Michigan Environmental Protection Agency spent another two years researching the impact of a highway on southern Oakland County, and in early 1979 in looked like it was all systems go.

There would be two more years of delays, however, and the generation-old dispute would not be settled until the waning days of the Carter administration.

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proposed light rail transit facility that would follow Woodward through Detroit, Highland Park, Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge and Royal Oak.

According to the MDOT, it is envisioned that I-696 will be a major east-west transit corridor interconnecting the radial transit lines in and out of Detroit, including the high-level rail service planned for Woodward.

A major transportation transfer station is planned for Woodward, including a parking structure, bus station and transit station.

"Impacts in the Detroit Zoo, which is located near the Woodward interchange, will be minimized through construction of a parking ramp to replace parking spaces removed by the I-696 freeway," the MDOT report said.

Measures also will be taken to minimize the impact on Rackham Golf Course, including the redesigning of some holes. Recreation areas in Pleasant Ridge and Oak Park, where facilities will be lost in construction, will be replaced, MDOT officials said.

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# What are next steps for the freeway?

Now that the final leg of Interstate-696 has been given an official blessing, what happens next?


According to the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), there is a nine-step process planned that will lead to completion of the last 7.9 miles of the freeway through south Oakland County.

1. MDOT representatives will meet with local officials of all the municipalities along the route. The officials will be brought up to date on the project and will resolve some outstanding issues, such as the location of pedestrian and vehicle overpasses.
2. Transportation representatives also will proceed with right-of-way acquisition, which is expected to take at least three years to complete. Some 350 parcels remain to be acquired.
3. The detailed design plans have yet to be prepared. This will take place while the right-of-way is being acquired.
4. A number of consultants will be hired for specialized work such as rehabilitation of the Rackham Golf Course and design of a about six years," a transportation spokesman said.
5. Construction projects involving sewers and utility relocation will be let for contract as soon as the right-of-way is obtained. Highway officials say they hope this can begin within two years.
6. The first major elements of road construction will be service roads. These will be built on one side at a time while traffic is maintained on existing roads. This construction will include retaining walls and noise barriers, where needed.
7. When the service roads are completed on one side, traffic will be shifted to those roads and the process will be repeated for the other service road.
8. The next step will be construction of the bridges. These will be phased so that traffic circulation across the construction area is maintained, transportation officials say.
9. The final major construction step will be the excavation of the depressed section of the freeway and paving the roadways.

"Following generally the above sequence, the construction will take about six years," a transportation spokesman said.

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